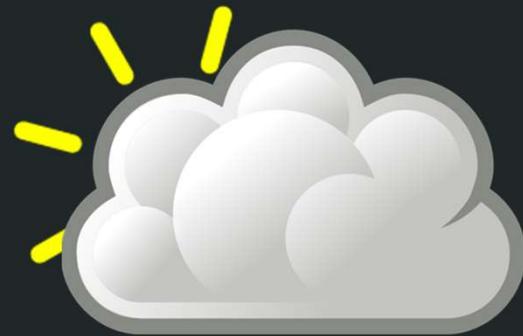# Silver Linings

Reference and Instruction in Academic Archives during COVID-19

Leah Tams, MSLS

Overview

- Research Questions

- Survey Procedure

- Results and Impact

- Key Takeaways and Silver Linings

A Note on Language

Research Questions

- What impact did COVID-19 have upon reference and instruction services provided by academic archives?

- What strategies and/or tools did archivists find particularly helpful in providing reference and instruction services during COVID-19?

- What kind of work did archivists engage in if they could *not* provide reference and/or instruction services?

Survey Procedure

- Anonymous survey
  - Institutional information
  - Open-ended questions

- Sent to:
  - SAA's Reference, Access, and Outreach Section
  - Archivists Think Tank Facebook group

- Closed after 4 weeks (mid-January 2021 to mid-February 2021)
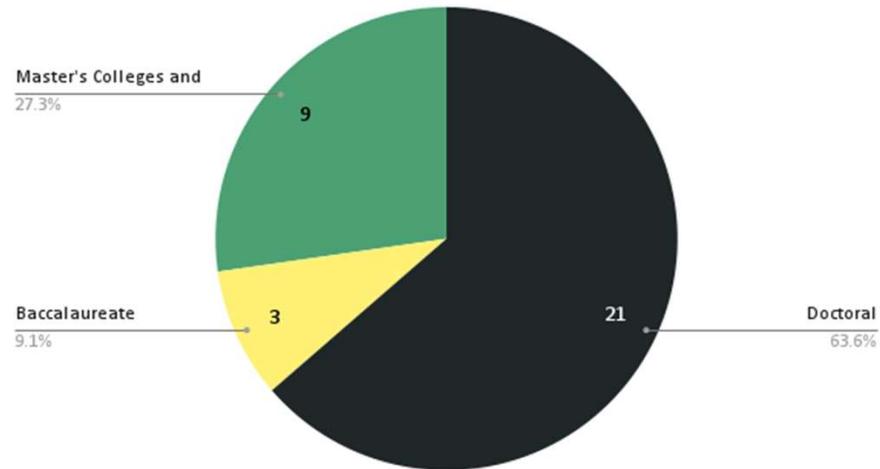
Results and Impact

Institutional Profiles

- 3 Carnegie Classifications of schools represented:

Institutional Classifications

Master's Colleges and
27.3%   9

Baccalaureate   3   21   Doctoral
9.1%   63.6%

COVID-19 Procedures

Health and safety protocols for staff	100%
Deep clean of interior spaces	39.4%
Sanitation/quarantining of materials	87.5%
Social distancing requirements for patrons	97%
Phased re-opening of operations	39.4%
New or revised support services that require staffing (e.g., remote work, trauma response)	51.5%
Other	12.1%

Impact upon Reference & Instruction

- Direct and significant impact

- Remote/hybrid services

- Decrease in instruction requests

- Increase in reference requests

"Best Practices" for Reference Services

- In-depth reference interviews
- Managing patron expectations
- Videoconferencing tools
- Digitization of materials

"Best Practices" for Instruction Services

- Collaborating with faculty and garnering their support
- TPS Collective
- Videoconferencing tools
- Digitization of materials

"Substitute" Work

- Professional development
- Outreach
- Processing backlogs
- Collecting COVID-related materials
- Improving description

Additional Insights

"Keeping up morale during this time period has been extremely difficult."

Additional Insights

"It is harder to have the authentic engagements with researchers in a completely virtual environment."

Additional Insights

"I have really had to manage user expectations. [We can't scan an entire collection and send it to a patron.]"

Additional Insights

"Some of the reference procedures have actually proved to be useful, and we'll continue using them after we fully reopen."

Additional Insights

"It's hard, but we've also been able to focus on our digital accessibility and online exhibits."

"This experience has enabled us to rethink how we offer reference and instruction and has made us more flexible in what can sometimes be a profession full of rigid standards. While I'm not glad to be in the middle of the pandemic, I'm thankful that we were forced to introduce some flexibility into our everyday workflow."

Key Takeaways and Silver Linings

Key Takeaways

- Academic libraries must:
    - Support the training and professional development of their archivists
    - Prioritize both the physical and mental well-being of their archivists
    - Develop flexible/alternative work plans for their archivists

Silver Linings

- Action items for academic libraries

- Archivists learned new skills and used new tools to enhance their work

- Archivists developed and implemented new processes to enhance their work

- Archivists updated legacy, offensive descriptions to be inclusive, anti-racist, and equitable

- Archivists demonstrated how adaptable and resilient they are

Thank you! I will answer any of your questions after Session 2.